



Conference to focus on Libby

Researchers converge on Missoula for asbestos discussion

By MATTHEW BUNK
Western News Reporter

The Libby asbestos problem will be the center of discussion at a medical conference expected to draw some of the world's most respected researchers June 24-25 in Missoula.

The conference, sponsored by the University of Montana Center for Environmental Health Sciences, has been dubbed "New Directions in Asbestos Research."

Environmental health and medical complications stemming from asbestos exposure, specifically the tremolite asbestos exposure in Libby, are slated to be the primary topics of debate.

Dr. Alan Whitehouse, a pulmonologist from Spokane, and Lincoln County Health Officer Dr. Brad

EPA continuing surveys, and residential cleanups

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Black both will give presentations Monday morning. Black will speak at 9 a.m. and Whitehouse will begin at 11 a.m.

"This will be a pretty high-powered group of people, very well-known," Whitehouse said. "This whole conference is about Libby and the research going on here."

The situation in Libby is "unique," according to Andri Holian, director of the Center for Environmental Health Sciences.

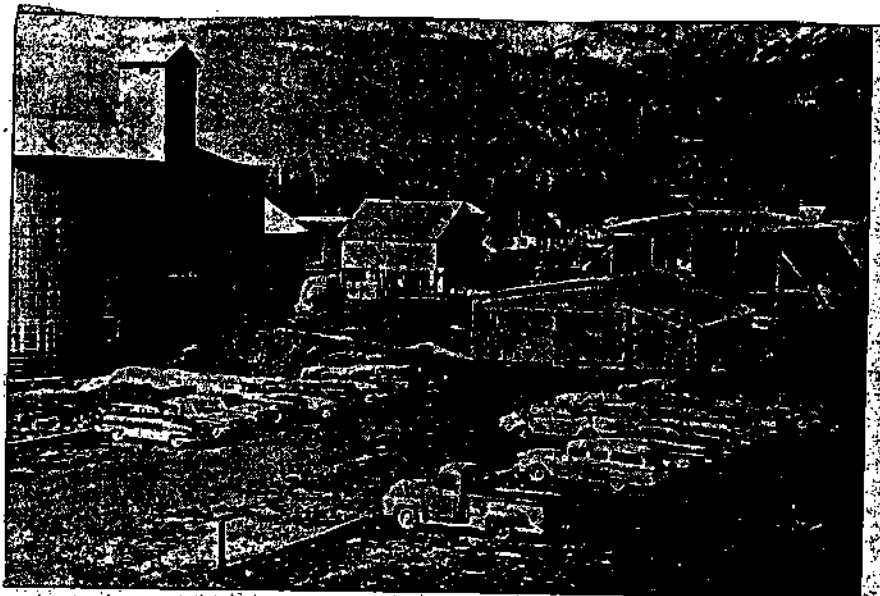
"This conference will be the first in Montana that will be directed to improving our understanding of the

mechanisms of asbestos-related diseases with a focus on the unique form of asbestos associated with the mine in Libby," Holian said. "The results of this conference will help focus research in order to expedite biomedical research aimed at these lung diseases."

Whitehouse said he is the only researcher expected to present information directly relating to clinical diseases caused by exposure to tremolite asbestos, which he considers to be one of the most deadly of the asbestos fibers.

Asbestos is the name given to a group of six different minerals — amosite, chrysotile, tremolite, actinolite, anthophyllite and crocidolite.

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The W.R. Grace export plant in Libby during the 1960s. The baseball fields and city swimming pool were located only blocks from the often-dusty plant.

Asbestos

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Although tremolite fibers are shorter in length than most other asbestos types, the damage caused upon inhalation could be 5-10 times as serious, Whitehouse claims.

Other medical professionals have argued that the longer fibers are more dangerous.

Along with Whitehouse's presentation centered on clinical

research, many of the other speakers will focus on epidemiologic (epidemic) issues and how to approach future asbestos research.

The conference is open to the public. Registration for both days of the conference costs \$175 for the general public, \$75 for post-doctoral investigators and students and \$35 for university faculty and staff.

Libby residents interested in attending the clinical segment of the conference on Monday morning will be charged a \$35 fee.

Pre-registration is required. To register, log on to www.umt.edu/cehs. Sign-up forms can be mailed or faxed to the university.

The conference begins at 8 a.m. on Monday, June 24.